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SUBJECT: Soviet Covert Action in Iran

I. Soviet policy toward Iran is directed toward the achievement of two goals. The first is to prevent the US from regaining its previous position in Iran. For this reason, Moscow publicly supports the anti-US actions of the Khomeini regime and misses no opportunity to report any US statement or action that might be exploited to further inflame anti-US sentiment in Iran. Second, Moscow hopes to see the establishment in Iran of a federation of autonomous minority regions, headed by a weak central government in Tehran that is communist, or at least leftist, and responsive to Soviet influence. Such a federation would provide welcome opportunities for Moscow to exert its influence and reduce the potential for unrest on its borders.

While Moscow will try to achieve its objectives through traditional diplomatic means, it will take advantage of the chaos that grips Iran to utilize what covert assets it has. We can identify some Soviet assets but we lack sufficient information to assess with confidence their effectiveness.

II. Moscow's most visible assets are the National Voice of Iran and the Tudeh (Masses) communist party of Iran.

A. Both Tudeh and NVOI depend on the USSR for support and NVOI, which broadcasts from the Baku region of Soviet Azerbaijan, probably could not exist without Soviet assistance.

B. NVOI and Tudeh pursue a two track policy.

1. Publicly they support Khomeini and the revolution and go out of their way to identify themselves with the goals of the revolution. Tudeh tries to portray itself as Khomeini's junior partner in the revolution to boost its own stock among the masses.

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2. At the same time, Tudeh is exploiting the opportunity to work openly to expand its own influence among its traditional target groups, students and workers in the oil fields.

a) Tudeh has begun to publish newspapers and magazines on a fairly regular basis and each is targeted to attract a specific audience.

b) There have been reports that the Party is trying to recruit members of the military and is trying to locate former Party members who may have had military or paramilitary training.

c) Tudeh is trying to create a clandestine military organization but we doubt that it would be able to carry out a successful coup unless there is a total collapse of the central government and the USSR offers extensive aid, probably including its own troops.

C. We are unable to assess with confidence the size of the party or the extent of its influence. The same is true of NVOI.

1. The Party membership is estimated to range from 5,000 to 35,000.

2. We monitor NVOI but we cannot determine the size of its audience or the impact it has on its listeners. Its broadcasts generally parallel the current Khomeini line. This may only add to Khomeini's prestige and do little for NVOI or Tudeh.

3. We believe that Tudeh's appeal is limited because in the popular mind it is tainted by its subservience to Moscow and the memory of the Soviet occupation is still strong.

4. The party and NVOI have endorsed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan putting them at odds with Khomeini and Bani-Sadr. Since Shiites in Afghanistan appear to be particular targets for repression by the Soviet-backed regime, Tudeh support for the Kabul government may further damage its image among the Iranian Shiites.

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III. We believe that Soviet subversive activity among minorities has increased in recent months. Moscow probably hopes that unrest in minority areas will:

- A. further weaken the central government;
- B. create the opportunity for the USSR to intervene in the border areas;
- C. lead to the establishment of a leftist government in Tehran.

IV. Subversive activity seems to be concentrated in Northwestern Iran, in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

A. Tudeh maintains contact with both the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and the Kurdish Democratic Party and has probably infiltrated its own cadres into both.

B. These parties headed Soviet puppet regimes after World War II and are still tainted by their collaboration with the Soviets at that time.

C. The Soviet KGB has reportedly sent its own agents--usually ethnic Azerbaijanis or Kurds--to these areas to gather intelligence and recruit agents.

1. Iranian recruits are trained in the Soviet Union by the KGB.

2. Upon returning to Iran, their activities are financed by the KGB and they are directed to infiltrate the military, government and security service.

3. Some reports claim that KGB agents are also active among workers in Isfahan Province, and the probability is that they are trying to infiltrate labor organizations throughout the country.

D. The Kurdish Democratic Party is reportedly the strongest and best organized group in Kurdistan. This organization apparently has close ties to the USSR.

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1. A KDP delegation reportedly went to Moscow last September to arrange secure aid to Kurdish nationalists and arrange for aid activities to be coordinated through the KDP.

2. The outcome of the meeting is uncertain but the KDP does receive weapons indirectly from the Soviet Union and East Germany. Bulgaria, Romania and Cuba also provide aid, primarily food and medical supplies.

D. In north central Iran, the Soviets reportedly are encouraging dissidence among the Turkomans and according to an unconfirmed report opened the Soviet border to provide a safe haven for them.

E. The Iranians have accused the Soviets of encouraging leftist activities in Baluchistan and allege that the Soviets are using the Babrak government in Afghanistan as a surrogate.

F. The Mujaheddin and the Chariks are leftist terrorist groups that Moscow would like to exploit because they have not been tainted by collaboration with the USSR in the past and appeal to different audiences that Tudeh.

1. The Mujaheddin try to combine Marxism and Islam to woo the bazaar class to its ranks.

2. The Chariks appeal to young intellectuals and have Maoist leanings.

3. Both groups claim to be anti-Soviet but the Chariks have ties to the pro-Soviet government of South Yemen.

V. The spottiness of evidence of Soviet involvement with dissident minorities in Iran does not mean that Soviet activity is not extensive. It reflects the fact that collection of such evidence is inhibited by the isolation of the areas involved, Moscow's ability to provide indirect aid or act through surrogates, and its capacity to exploit ethnic similarities and old contacts. Moreover, by undertaking such activities covertly, Moscow is able to deny involvement with Khomeini's opposition and keep open official lines of communication.

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